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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 ROME 005973

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EB/TPP/ABT FOR DEBBIE MALAC
STATE PASS USTR FOR SLOAN, NOVELLI
STATE PASS USDA FOR APHIS:SMCCAMMON, USDA/FAS:BLUM
USDA/FAS/ITT:EJONES
USDA/OS/HEGWOOD
STATE PASS FDA FOR EFLAMM
EPA FOR OFFICE OF ADMINISTRATOR

E.O. 12958: N/A
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SUBJECT: U.S. SCIENTISTS DESCRIBE BENEFITS OF AGRICULTURE
BIOTECHNOLOGY TO FARMERS, ENVIRONMENTAL GROUPS, AND CLERGY

REFS: A) ROME 1965 B) ROME 3433 C) ROME 3965

11. SUMMARY: MISSION ITALY ORGANIZED IN LATE OCTOBER PROGRAMS FOR THREE U.S. INVITED BIOTECH SCIENTISTS TO EXPAND THE SCOPE OF SCIENCE-BASED BIOTECH DEBATE IN ITALY, ESPECIALLY IN THE SOUTH, AN AREA IN WHICH KNOWLEDGE OF U.S. BIOTECH IS RELATIVELY THIN. THE ITALIAN SCIENTISTS FELT REINFORCED, SINCE VIRTUALLY ALL PARTICIPANTS - INCLUDING THE NAPLES PRESIDENT OF LEGAMBIENTE, ITALY'S LARGEST ENVIRONMENTAL NGO - AGREED THAT THE ITALIAN GOVERNMENT SHOULD PUSH AHEAD WITH INCREASED RESEARCH IN THE BIOTECH FIELD. DR. MASSIMO PACETTI, PRESIDENT OF ITALY'S THIRD LARGEST FARMERS' ASSOCIATION, CITED THE POTENTIAL OF BIOTECHNOLOGY TO INCREASE ITALY'S AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION, INCREASE FARMERS' INCOMES, AND REDUCE HARM TO THE ENVIRONMENT. CONSUMERS ASSOCIATIONS AND GREEN NGO'S PARTICIPATED FOR THE FIRST TIME IN AN EMBASSY EVENT ON BIOTECH, SHOWING THEY ARE NOW OPEN TO DEBATE. THE PROGRAM UNCLASSIFIED

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ADDRESSED THE KEY MISSION OBJECTIVE - OUTREACH OF FARMER ORGANIZATIONS FOR BIOTECHNOLOGY, ENABLING POST TO EXPAND ITS RANGE OF BIOTECHNOLOGY CONTACTS, AND USING A POSITIVE, NON-POLITICAL, SCIENCE-BASED APPROACH. END SUMMARY.

PROGRAM IN NAPLES

12. ON OCTOBER 22, CONSULATE NAPLES CO-SPONSORED WITH THE ITALIAN FARMERS' ASSOCIATION (CIA) A CONFERENCE IN NAPLES TO DISCUSS POTENTIAL AGRICULTURAL BIOTECH APPLICATIONS IN THE MEDITERRANEAN REGION. APPROXIMATELY 100 ITALIANS FROM THROUGHOUT ITALY ATTENDED THE CONFERENCE, INCLUDING FARMERS, RESEARCHERS, UNIVERSITY PROFESSORS, ENVIRONMENTALISTS, BUSINESSMEN INVOLVED IN THE FOOD PROCESSING INDUSTRY, AND PRESS. NAPLES CONSUL GENERAL BISHOP DELIVERED OPENING REMARKS AT THE SESSION, WHICH WAS CHAIRED BY NAPLES UNIVERSITY PROFESSOR OF AGRICULTURAL GENETICS DR. LUIGI MONTI.

13. THE PROGRAM, DEVELOPED IN CONCERT WITH PA ROME, FAS ROME AND THE ROME SCIENCE OFFICE, INCLUDED THREE U.S. SPEAKERS - TWO SPONSORED BY PUBLIC AFFAIRS, AND THE THIRD BY FAS ROME. DR. RAY BRESSAN (PROFESSOR OF PLANT PHYSIOLOGY AT PURDUE UNIVERSITY) PLACED THE BIOTECHNOLOGY DEBATE IN ITS HISTORICAL CONTEXT, EMPHASIZING BIOTECH AS A NATURAL CONTINUATION IN THE PROCESS OF AGRICULTURAL INNOVATION THAT HAS BEEN GOING ON FOR MILLENNIA. BRESSAN STRESSED THAT GIVEN THE EXPONENTIAL GROWTH OF THE HUMAN POPULATION OVER THE PAST 150 YEARS, TECHNOLOGICAL INNOVATION IS THE ONLY WAY UNCLASSIFIED

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TO ENSURE A SUFFICIENT FOOD SUPPLY WITHOUT INCREASING STRESS ON AN OVERTBURDENED ENVIRONMENT. PROF. MAARTEN CHRISPEELS (PROFESSOR OF MOLECULAR AGRICULTURE, UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA AT SAN DIEGO) FOCUSED ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF GENOMICS AND ONGOING RESEARCH EFFORTS TO ENHANCE THE RESISTANCE OF PLANTS USED IN AGRICULTURE. JANET CARPENTER, A RESEARCHER AT THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR FOOD AND AGRICULTURE POLICY, SUMMARIZED A NUMBER OF RECENT STUDIES ON THE IMPACT OF GENETICALLY MODIFIED CROPS IN THE UNITED STATES. THE EVIDENCE OF A DRAMATIC DECLINE IN PESTICIDE USE AND LOWER PRODUCTION COSTS FOR FARMERS, FOLLOWING THE INTRODUCTION OF BIOTECH CROPS, WAS PARTICULARLY INTERESTING TO THE AUDIENCE.

14. ON THE ITALIAN SIDE, PROF. FABIO VERONESI FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF PERUGIA ARGUED THAT BIOTECHNOLOGY COULD PLAY A

CRUCIAL ROLE IN "DEFENDING" THE AUTHENTICITY OF "TYPICAL" PRODUCTS FROM ITALY'S VARIOUS REGIONS. GENETIC TESTING, ACCORDING TO VERONESI, MAKES IT POSSIBLE TO DETECT "FAKES" - IMPORTED PRODUCTS THAT ARE BEING PASSED OFF AS THE "REAL THING." VERONESI'S ARGUMENT HAS GREAT RESONANCE IN ITALY, WHERE IT IS OFTEN ARGUED THAT BIOTECHNOLOGY THREATENS TO UNDERMINE THE HIGH-END NICHE MARKET FOR TYPICAL ITALIAN PRODUCTS. DR. ALBINO MAGGIO, A BIOTECH RESEARCHER AT THE NATIONAL AGENCY FOR NEW TECHNOLOGIES, ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENT (ENEA), DISCUSSED HIS RESEARCH IN GENETIC MANIPULATION THAT MAKES CROPS MORE RESISTANT TO HIGH-SALINITY ENVIRONMENTS. THE ISSUE IS ESPECIALLY RELEVANT IN SOUTHERN ITALY, WHERE SOIL SALINIZATION IS A SERIOUS PROBLEM IN KEY AGRICULTURAL REGIONS SUCH AS PUGLIA AND SICILY. FORMER AGRICULTURE MINISTER PAOLO DE CASTRO MADE A STRONG ARGUMENT FOR

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INFO	LOG-00	NP-00	AID-00	CEA-01	CIAE-00	COME-00	CTME-00
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INR-00	IO-00	ITC-01	L-00	VCE-00	AC-01	NSAE-00	
NSCE-00	NSF-01	OES-00	OIC-02	OMB-01	OPIC-01	PM-00	
PRS-00	ACE-00	SP-00	SSO-00	STR-00	TEST-00	TRSE-00	
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USDA WASHDC
INFO EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE
AMCONSUL MILAN
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INCREASED BIOTECH RESEARCH, NOT ONLY IN ITALY BUT THROUGHOUT THE EUROPEAN UNION. IN A THOROUGH OVERVIEW OF THE STATE OF BIOTECHNOLOGY IN THE EU, DE CASTRO CALLED FOR DRAMATIC BUDGET INCREASES FOR RESEARCH. HOWEVER, HE POINTED OUT THAT RESEARCH IN BIOTECH NOW WOULD IN NO WAY PRECLUDE FUTURE DECISIONS TO LIMIT THE MARKETING OF GENETICALLY MODIFIED FOODS IN EUROPE.

15. THE AUDIENCE WAS GENERALLY OPEN-MINDED ABOUT THE POTENTIAL OF BIOTECHNOLOGY IN THE ITALIAN CONTEXT. THE PROGRAM CONCLUDED WITH A LIVELY DISCUSSION, DURING WHICH VIRTUALLY ALL PARTICIPANTS - INCLUDING THE NAPLES PRESIDENT OF LEGAMBIENTE, ITALY'S LARGEST ENVIRONMENTAL NGO - AGREED THAT THE ITALIAN GOVERNMENT SHOULD PUSH AHEAD WITH INCREASED RESEARCH IN THE BIOTECH FIELD. DR. MASSIMO PACETTI, NATIONAL PRESIDENT OF THE FARMERS' ASSOCIATION, CLOSED THE MEETING BY CITING THE POTENTIAL OF BIOTECHNOLOGY TO INCREASE ITALY'S AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION, INCREASE FARMERS' INCOMES, AND REDUCE HARM TO THE ENVIRONMENT.

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16. THE PROGRAM WAS COVERED EXTENSIVELY BY LOCAL/REGIONAL MEDIA INCLUDING "RAI 3," "TELECAPRI," "NATIONAL NETWORK 5 STELLE," "CANALE 21," "IL MATTINO," "ANSA," "IL DENARO," "IL GIORNALE DI NAPOLI," AND RADIO CLUB '91." THE LEADING

NATIONAL ECONOMIC DAILY "IL SOLE 24 ORE," "LA STAMPA," AND THE NATIONAL NETWORK "RAI 1" ALSO PROVIDED STRAIGHT FORWARD COVERAGE.

17. THE NAPLES PROGRAM MOVED OUR AGENDA FORWARD BY EXPANDING THE SCOPE OF SCIENCE-BASED BIOTECH DEBATE IN SOUTHERN ITALY, AN AREA IN WHICH KNOWLEDGE OF U.S. BIOTECH RESEARCH AND FIELD RESULTS ARE RELATIVELY THIN. CONSULATE NAPLES EXPANDED ITS RANGE OF BIOTECHNOLOGY CONTACTS IN THE SOUTH, THUS LAYING THE GROUNDWORK FOR FURTHER "AUDIENCE-BUILDING" IN FUTURE PROGRAMS.

PROGRAM IN ROME

18. BEFORE GOING TO NAPLES, BRESSAN AND CHRISPEELS MET WITH FAO OFFICIALS, PROF. JOSE ESQUINAS-ALCAZAR, SECRETARY OF THE COMMISSION ON GENETIC RESOURCES FOR FOOD AND AGRICULTURE, AND ANDREA SONNINO, SENIOR AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH OFFICER. CHRISPEELS MADE A PRESENTATION ABOUT HIS NEW BOOK "PLANTS, GENES AND CROP BIOTECHNOLOGY" AND ASKED FOR FAO HELP ON DISTRIBUTING IT TO DEVELOPING COUNTRIES UNIVERSITY TEACHERS.

19. ON OCT. 23 EMBASSY ROME ORGANIZED AN OPEN DISCUSSION MEETING WITH THE MOST IMPORTANT ITALIAN CONSUMERS ASSOCIATIONS, TRADE UNION REPRESENTATIVES, AND ENVIRONMENTAL UNCLASSIFIED

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NGO'S (GREENPEACE AND WWF). THE THREE SCIENTISTS MADE SHORT PRESENTATIONS AND A LONG Q AND A SESSION FOLLOWED. IN ROME THE SPEAKERS MANAGED TO CORRECT FALSE IMPRESSIONS ABOUT BIOTECHNOLOGY HELD BY MANY CONSUMERS IN ITALY. ONE SIMPLE BUT IMPORTANT POINT THEY MADE WAS THAT BIOTECH PRODUCTS ARE CONTROLLED BY PUBLIC AUTHORITIES IN THE U.S. (I.E. THE FDA) AND THOROUGHLY TESTED BEFORE BEING APPROVED FOR THE MARKET. THIS CAME AS A SURPRISE TO SOME PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS, WHO WERE CONVINCED THAT DECISIONS ABOUT COMMERCIALIZATION WERE BASED SOLELY ON RESEARCH CONDUCTED BY THE PRODUCERS THEMSELVES. POST BELIEVES THAT THE EVENT WAS A SUCCESS: IT WAS THE FIRST TIME THAT POST ORGANIZED AN EVENT INVITING STRONG ANTI-GMO REPRESENTATIVES AND ALL THE INVITED PEOPLE CAME (A VERY RARE EVENT). MOREOVER, EVEN IF SCIENTISTS AND AUDIENCE DID NOT CHANGE THEIR POSITIONS, THE DEBATE WAS LIVELY AND FRANK AND LASTED FOR TWO HOURS LONGER THAN PROGRAMMED.

10. WHILE IN ROME, EMBASSY VATICAN CHARGE ORGANIZED A LUNCHEON FOR THE THREE EXPERTS, WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF THE VATICAN FOREIGN MINISTRY, THE PONTIFICAL ACADEMIES AND THE SANT'EGIDIO COMMUNITY - A VATICAN-RELATED NGO THAT WORKS IN CONFLICT PREVENTION AND DEVELOPMENT, PRIMARILY IN AFRICA. CHRISPEEL'S PRESENTATION OF BIOTECH FOOD SAFETY AND THE APPROPRIATENESS OF USING BIOTECH AS A KEY TOOL IN DEVELOPING COUNTRY FOOD SECURITY HELPED REINFORCE THE INCLINATIONS OF THE BIO-ETHICISTS FROM THE PONTIFICAL ACADEMIES. THIS COMMON PERSPECTIVE ALLOWED EMBASSY VATICAN TO PRESSURE THE

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ACTION EUR-00

INFO	LOG-00	NP-00	AID-00	CEA-01	CIAE-00	COME-00	CTME-00
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E-00	UTED-00	VC-00	FRB-00	HHS-01	H-01	TEDE-00	
INR-00	IO-00	ITC-01	L-00	VCE-00	AC-01	DCP-01	
NSAE-00	NSCE-00	NSF-01	OES-00	OIC-02	OMB-01	OPIC-01	
PM-00	PRS-00	ACE-00	SP-00	SSO-00	STR-00	TEST-00	
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P 131142Z DEC 02
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HOLY SEE'S FOREIGN MINISTRY REPRESENTATIVE TO ADOPT A MORE PROACTIVE SUPPORT OF THE BIOTECH FOODS FOR THE BENEFIT OF PEOPLE ON THE DEVELOPING WORLD. THE LUNCH EXCHANGE ALSO ENGAGED THE SANT'EGIDIO COMMUNITY AS A PARTNER ON BIOTECH FOODS. IT IS NOW FULLY COMMITTED TO WORKING WITH THE USG AND THE HOLY SEE ON HOW BEST TO USE THE TECHNOLOGY TO HELP PEOPLE, AND IS HOSTING A BRIEFING TO THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS. THE EMBASSY IS ARRANGING DECEMBER 18.

PROGRAM IN MILAN

[11.](#) PROF. CRISPEELS ENDED HIS TRIP IN MILAN: HE WAS INTERVIEWED BY "IL SOLE 24 ORE RADIO" AND THE FINANCIAL DAILY "IL SOLE 24 ORE", AT U.S. CONSULATE IN MILAN. SCIENCE MAGAZINE "LE SCIENZE" WILL SOON PUBLISH A REVIEW OF HIS BOOK. PROFESSOR MIRELLA SARI GORLA, PRESIDENT OF THE ITALIAN SOCIETY OF AGRICULTURAL GENETICS, HOSTED A WORKING

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LUNCH. PARTICIPANTS INCLUDED PROFESSOR CHIARA TONELLI, DR. ALLESSANDRO VITALE OF THE NATIONAL RESEARCH COUNCIL, AND DR. LEONARDO VINGIANI, DIRECTOR GENERAL OF ASSOBIOTECH (TRADE ASSOCIATION OF BIOTECH COMPANIES). A CRISPEELS' LECTURE AND Q AND A WITH OVER 100 PROFESSORS AND STUDENTS AT THE UNIVERSITA STATALE FOLLOWED THE LUNCH.

BIOTECH CAN REACH ITALY- BUT WE NEED TO KEEP SENDING THE MESSAGE

[12.](#) PROF. CHRISPEELS AND BRESSAN RAISED SEVERAL POINTS WHICH POST WILL EMPHASIZE IN FUTURE DISCUSSIONS WITH THE GOI AND ANTI-GMO'S STAKEHOLDERS.

- IF ITALY BECOMES A GMO-FREE ISLAND IT WILL LACK TRAINED PERSONNEL AND EXPERTISE TO DEAL WITH EMERGING PLANT DISEASES AND INSECT PESTS THAT AFFECT ITS PRINCIPAL DOMESTIC AND EXPORT FOOD CROPS.

- BIOTECH RESEARCH COULD SAVE ENDANGERED ITALIAN TYPICAL FOOD CROPS.

- BIOTECH WILL REDUCE USE OF PESTICIDES.

- BIOTECH FOODS UNDERGO FAR MORE RIGOROUS SAFETY TESTS THAN THOSE USED FOR NON-BIOTECH AND "BIOLOGICAL" FOODS.

- WHILE BIOTECH FOODS ARE CREATED BY INSERTING A SINGLE GENE INTO A PLANT, TRADITIONAL BREEDING MIXES GENETIC MATERIAL IN

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A COMPARATIVELY UNCONTROLLED WAY WITH LESS PREDICTABLE RESULTS.

- NEW GENERATION BIOTECH PRODUCTS WILL INCLUDE HEALTHIER AND NUTRITIONALLY SUPERIOR FOOD (HYPOALLERGENIC, WITH ENHANCED OMEGA FATTY ACIDS, OR MEDIUM LENGTH CHAINS, WITH VITAMIN A).

- THE USE OF GENETICALLY MODIFIED PLANTS TO PRODUCE PHARMACEUTICALS HAS THE POTENTIAL TO REDUCE THE COST OF SOME DRUGS BY 90 PCT PLACING ADVANCED DRUG THERAPIES WITHIN REACH OF POOR COUNTRIES AND INDIVIDUALS.

- BIOTECH COULD MITIGATE THE LARGE, OFTEN NEGATIVE, IMPACT ON THE ENVIRONMENT OF AGRICULTURE: LARGER PER HECTARE YIELDS CAN LEAVE MORE LAND IN FOREST, REDUCE PESTICIDE DEPENDENCE, AND DROUGHT RESISTANT VARIETIES CAN REDUCE PRESSURE ON SCARCE WATER SUPPLIES EVEN IN ITALY.

- INCREASED WORLD FOOD DEMAND NEEDS AN INCREASED FOOD PRODUCTION. BIOTECH OFFERS ONE OF THE MOST PROMISING WAYS TO INCREASE FOOD PRODUCTION WITHIN PRESENT RESOURCE CONSTRAINTS (LIMITED WATER AND ARABLE LAND).

- AS PEOPLE GET RICHER THEY TEND TO MOVE FROM A GRAIN-BASED DIET TO A DIET RICHER IN ANIMAL PRODUCTS SUCH AS MEAT. BIOTECHNOLOGY COULD PROVIDE THE NECESSARY QUANTITY OF HIGH QUALITY FEEDS REQUIRED.

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